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AN

ATTEMPT

TO

ACCOUNT FOR THE INFIDELITY

OF THE LATE

EDWARD GIBBON, Esq.

FOUNDED ON HIS OWN MEMOIRS,

PUBLISHED BY JOHN LORD SHEFFIELD;

WITH

REFLECTIONS ON THE BEST MEANS OF CHECKING THE PRESENT ALARMING PROGRESS OF

SCEPTICISM AND IRRELIGION:

INCLUDING

AN ACCOUNT OF THE CONVERSION AND DEATH OF THE RIGHT HON. GEORGE LORD LYTTLETON.

By JOHN EVANS, A. M.

Too firm from DUTY's sacred path to turn,
We breathe an honest sigh of deep concern;
And pity GENIUS, when its wild career
Gives Faith a wound, or Innocence a fear!

HAYLEY's Historical Epistles to E. Gibbon, Esq.

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PREFACE.

THAT an individual, who is entruſted with the education of youth, ſhould endeavour to ſerve their beſt intereſts, by guarding their minds againſt the pernicious tenets of Infidelity, requires no apology. Mr. Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* connects the ancient and modern hiſtory of the world. A tutor naturally puts ſuch a performance into the hands of his pupils. The following pages, it is humbly preſumed, may prove not unuſeful to young perſons, who, in the peruſal of that work, are liable to be injured by the inſinuations which are there thrown out againſt the truth and excellence of the Chriſtian religion. That ſuch an injury may be ſuſtained by the unwary, is not mere imagination. One inſtance in particular was not long ago communicated to the Author, by a reſpectable Miniſter of the eſtabliſhed church, of a young gentleman of fortune, who had imbibed, from Mr. Gibbon's hiſtory, the ſtrongeſt prejudices againſt Chriſ-

tianity. But whether the unhappy youth, who was cut off in the prime of life, carried theſe prejudices with him to his grave, is not certainly known. Many other caſes of a ſimilar nature, no doubt, exiſt. The Author therefore has thought, that beſide the able replies which were made to theſe inſinuations, upon their firſt publication, by Lord Hales, by Dr. Watſon, the preſent Biſhop of Landaff, and by others, an *antidote* might be furniſhed from certain circumſtances related in Mr. Gibbon's own *Memoirs*, lately publiſhed by Lord Sheffield. He flatters himſelf that *the Attempt* is laudable; but how far it is calculated to accompliſh this moſt deſirable end, the candid and judicious reader muſt determine.

Far is it from being the Author's intention to detract from the merits, or to exaggerate the defects, of the Roman Hiſtorian. Both are juſtly appreciated by Mr. Porſon (one of the ableſt critics of the age) in the preface of his anſwer to Archdeacon Travis. Nor is it his deſign to depreciate the many virtues of Mr. Gibbon, either as an individual or as a member of the community. This would be invidious and unjuſt. With his treatment of Chriſtianity the Author is concerned, and wiſhes

wiſhes to account for his unhappy prejudices againſt it, in a manner by which the force of his inſinuations might be weakened or deſtroyed. At the ſame time, let it be remembered, that whatever encomiums are due to the talents and virtues of Mr. Gibbon, yet, for his miſrepreſentations of revelation, he is not entitled either to the admiration or gratitude of the Chriſtian world.

As to the REFLECTIONS, they are intended to remind parents of their duty, and to direct the minds of their offspring to the ſerious and impartial examination of the Chriſtian religion—than which nothing can be of greater moment to beings born for immortality! The frequent quotations are introduced to elucidate the ſubject, and to lead the young reader into an acquaintance with the excellent writers out of whom the paſſages are taken. The Author would be ſorry to give any juſt cauſe of offence, either to the Unbeliever, or to any denomination of Chriſtians. The diffuſion of *evangelical truth*, in an age, when *infidelity* and *bigotry* ſeem to be dividing the world between them, is his primary aim. If, therefore, a freedom has been indulged, it is humbly hoped, that it will be found, upon a diſpaſſionate ſurvey,

to

to be a freedom authorized by the vaſt importance of the ſubject, and remote from an uncharitable licentiouſneſs.

Nor let it be imagined that the Author has experienced any particular pleaſure in thus tracing the ſources of Mr. Gibbon's ſcepticiſm, any farther than it may tend to facilitate the ſpread of Chriſtianity. He would much rather have had it in his power to have ranked him with *Locke*, *Newton*, *Hartley*, and other illuſtrious laymen, who by their writings have defended, and with their lives adorned, the beſt and pureſt religion which was ever inſtituted. The benign genius of Chriſtianity teaches its profeſſors not to inſult, but to commiſerate the condition of *the Unbeliever*, who, by rejecting *the glorious goſpel of the bleſſed God*, deprives himſelf of the moſt powerful motives to holineſs, cuts off the deareſt reſource of human comfort, and not unfrequently circumſcribes his proſpects within the narrow precincts of mortality.

Other prefatory obſervations might be added reſpecting the contents of this little pamphlet. But an intelligent public will diſcern its purport, and the Author having already experienced their candour, will not ungratefully queſtion its exerciſe on the preſent occaſion.

May

May Almighty God! ſmile on this effort, which (however inconſiderable) is ſincerely deſigned to advance the intereſts of *true religion*, by guarding the minds of the RISING GENERATION againſt the baneful effects of prejudice, and by haſtening the period, when TRUTH and RIGHTEOUSNESS ſhall eſtabliſh their joint empire over the hearts and conſciences of the children of men.

Savile Row, Mile End,
FEB. 1, 1797.

BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

1. JUVENILE PIECES, deſigned for the Youth of both Sexes. Second Edition.

2. A SERMON, preached at Worſhip Street, on the deceaſe of Drs. *Stennett*, *Kippis*, and *Harris*; to which are prefixed, a few particulars of their Lives and Writings.

3. A SKETCH OF THE DENOMINATIONS OF THE CHRISTIAN WORLD. Third Edition.

4. A SEQUEL TO THE ABOVE SKETCH; being *A Preſervative againſt the Infidelity and Uncharitableneſs of the 18th Century*; or, Teſtimonies in Behalf of Chriſtian Candour and Unanimity, by Divines of *the Church of England*—of *the Kirk of Scotland*—and among *the Proteſtant Diſſenters*; to which is prefixed—An Eſſay on the Right of private Judgment in matters of Religion.

"In times of general animoſity, in which the public mind is become a ſtormy ocean, great praiſe is due to the friendly hand that will attempt to ſmooth the perturbed waves, by throwing on their ſurface the oil of candour. At various ſeaſons in which the ſpirit of theological controverſy has been inflamed, great and good men, who have been as much concerned to practiſe Chriſtianity as to underſtand it, have written exhortations to moderation and unanimity; and Mr. Evans has performed a meritorious work in bringing together the ſentiments of a great variety of excellent men, of different ſects, on this important ſubject. The paſſages are ſelected with judgment, and form a powerful apology for that uſeful, but, in theſe turbulent times, too much deſpiſed virtue—MODERATION. It is highly grateful to a benevolent mind, to ſee ſo many eminent men, profeſſors of different creeds, uniting to recommend and enforce this amiable temper; and it will be impoſſible that this excellent *Irenicum* ſhould be read without producing a ſtrong effect on young minds in favour of that religion of which the firſt law is charity. The ſenſible and liberal eſſay prefixed to the collection, reflects honour on the author's underſtanding, taſte, and ſpirit."

MONTHLY REVIEW, FOR JUNE, 1796.

AN ATTEMPT TO ACCOUNT FOR THE INFIDELITY OF THE LATE EDWARD GIBBON, Esq.

EDWARD GIBBON, Esq. the late celebrated hiſtorian of *the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, was as eminent for his talents and learning, as his ſcepticiſm was notorious and offenſive. The intereſting memoirs of his life and writings, compoſed by himſelf, and recently publiſhed, together with his poſthumous works, by Lord Sheffield, will again rouſe the attention of the public to his great hiſtoric work, and probably the minds of the riſing generation will be injured by the ſcoffs with which the Chriſtian religion is there treated. Now if from his *own Memoirs* we can account for his ſceptical prejudices, without charging *the evidences of our religion* with defect, (which is the caſe with Unbelievers) we may poſſibly preſerve ſome of his young readers from the contamination of his infidelity.

The life of Mr. Gibbon may be diſtributed into three periods, from his birth, in 1737, to his arrival at Oxford in 1752; from that time till his return from Lauſanne, in 1758; and from thence to his death, in the year 1794.

Let us conſider that period of his life which paſſed from his birth, in 1737, till his arrival at Oxford in 1752.

Mr. Gibbon informs us, that he was born at Putney, in the county of Surry, and that to preſerve and rear ſo frail a being, the moſt tender aſſiduity was ſcarcely ſufficient. In conſequence of this delicate ſtate of health, little application was given to his learning. His father being a man of the world, ſeems to have expreſſed no particular concern for the proper inſtruction of his ſon in the principles of religion: his mother died when he was ten years of age, and his aunt, to whoſe care he was afterwards committed, was occupied in watching over his health with unremitting aſſiduity. He was, indeed, taught reading, writing, and arithmetic, and made ſome progreſs in the rudiments of the Latin language. Not one word, however, is ſaid of his being initiated into the elements of the Chriſtian religion. The more ſtreſs is laid on this neglect, becauſe it led to ſerious conſequences. Unacquainted with the religion of the New Teſtament, he was expoſed to the inroads of enthuſiaſm, and lay open

open to the impreſſions of ſuperſtition. The famous Mr. William Law had been his father's private tutor, and continued, till his death, the ſpiritual director of his aunt, who lived to an advanced age in Northamptonſhire. The *myſticiſm* of Mr. Law is well known, and his productions were read and admired by a certain claſs in the religious world. His celebrity as a writer, and the intimacy which ſubſiſted between him and the Gibbon family, would naturally turn Mr. Gibbon's attention to the flights of myſticiſm, which he, in the ſimplicity of his heart, might deem the genuine principles of Chriſtianity. His natural good ſenſe would revolt againſt a ſyſtem, which is as contrary to reaſon, as it is oppoſite to the nature and genius of the goſpel. But of this latter circumſtance, Mr. Gibbon, from the neglect of his religious education, was probably ignorant, and therefore might have been diſguſted with the very firſt religion which arreſted his attention. He tells us, in his Memoirs, that he had peruſed Mr. Law's writings, and ſpeaks of their containing the ſallies of religious phrenzy, and the dark incomprehenſible flights of Behmeniſm. As for the encomium which Mr. Gibbon beſtows on them, it appears to have been given with the intention of prejudicing the reader againſt Chriſtianity itſelf; for if a wild and irrational enthuſiaſm be the religion

of the New Teſtament, men of ſenſe will have ſufficient cauſe to diſbelieve and reject it.

No reflection is here intended on the moral character or integrity of Mr. Law, who was a good man, and in many reſpects an uſeful writer. His *Serious Call*, though not untinctured with enthuſiaſm, is a work of conſiderable merit. But for ſome time before he died, he fell into all the abſurdities of Behmeniſm. He even publiſhed a treatiſe preparatory to an edition of the works of Jacob Behmen, the greateſt viſionary that ever exiſted. His principal work, though a moſt incomprehenſible writer, was entitled, *Aurora, or the Riſing Sun*; which contained the reſult of three ſeparate viſions, with which, according to his own account, the Almighty had favoured him. Now the writings of Mr. Law, who was himſelf enthuſiaſtical, and who could patronize the productions of ſuch a viſionary as Jacob Behmen, could not inſpire Mr. Gibbon with very favourable ideas of the Chriſtian religion*.

We now proceed to the ſecond period of Mr. Gibbon's life, from his arrival at Oxford, till his return from Lauſanne in 1758.

Mr. Gibbon is ſtill more unfortunate with reſpect to religion in this ſecond ſtage of his exiſt-

* Jacob Behmen died at *Gorlitz*, a village in Germany, 1624. Mr. Law died 1761.

ence.

ence. Before he had reached his fifteenth year he was carried to Oxford, and matriculated as Gentleman Commoner of Magdalen College, April 3, 1752. What he has obſerved, reſpecting his continuance there, is almoſt incredible. The ſingular paſſage ſhall be tranſcribed for the information of the reader.—" It might at leaſt " be expected, that an eccleſiaſtical ſchool ſhould " inculcate the orthodox principles of religion; " but our venerable mother had contrived to " unite the oppoſite extremes of bigotry and in- " difference: an heretic or unbeliever was a " monſter in her eyes, but ſhe was always, or " often, or ſometimes, remiſs in the ſpiritual edu- " cation of her own children. According to " the ſtatutes of the Univerſity, every ſtudent, " before he is matriculated, muſt ſubſcribe his " aſſent to the thirty-nine articles of the Church " of England; which are ſigned by more than " read, and read by more than believe them. " My inſufficient age excuſed me, however, from " the immediate performance of this legal ce- " remony, and the Vice-Chancellor directed me " to return as ſoon as I ſhould have accom- " pliſhed my fifteenth year, recommending me, " in the mean while, to the inſtruction of my col- " lege. My college forgot to inſtruct, I forgot " to return, and was myſelf forgotten by the firſt " magiſtrate of the Univerſity. Without a ſingle

" lecture,

" lecture, either public or private, either Chriſ-
" tian or proteſtant—without any academical
" ſubſcription—without any epiſcopal confirma-
" tion, I was left by the dim light of my cate-
" chiſm to grope my way to the chapel commu-
" nion table, where I was admitted, without a
" queſtion how far, or by what means, I might be
" qualified to receive the ſacrament. Such al-
" moſt incredible neglect was productive of the
" worſt miſchiefs. From my childhood I had
" been fond of religious diſputation—my poor
" aunt has often been puzzled by the myſteries
" which ſhe ſtrove to believe; nor had the elaſ-
" tic ſpring been totally broken by the weight
" of the atmoſphere of Oxford. The blind ac-
" tivity of idleneſs urged me to advance, without
" armour, into the dangerous mazes of contro-
" verſy; and, at the age of ſixteen, I bewildered
" myſelf in the errors of the Church of
" Rome."

Can it be a matter of ſurprize, that after ſuch neglect, Mr. Gibbon's inquiſitive mind ſhould have fallen a prey to the devices of popery? It may, however, be remarked, that had he been properly inſtructed in the religion of Chriſt, drawn from the Scriptures, he could not have ſo eaſily embraced the abſurdities and corruptions of the Romiſh church. Mr. Gibbon alſo informs us, that ſoon after his converſion, ſome prieſt, in London, admitted him into the pale of the church,

and

and at his feet, on the 8th of June, 1753, he ſolemnly, though privately, abjured the errors of hereſy. His father, grieved and ſurpriſed at the event, forbade his return to Magdalen College, and ſent him to reſide with a Mr. Pavilliard, a *Calviniſt* miniſter, at Lauſanne in Switzerland. This gentleman ſucceeded in reclaiming his pupil from the errors of popery. Take Mr. Gibbon's own account of the concluſion of this very ſingular buſineſs. "Pavilliard was not unmindful that his firſt taſk, his moſt important duty was, to reclaim me from the errors of popery. The intermixture of ſects has rendered the Swiſs clergy acute and learned on the topics of controverſy, and I have ſome of his letters, in which he celebrates the dexterity of his attack, and my gradual conceſſions, after a firm and well-managed defence. I was willing, and am now willing, to allow him a handſome ſhare of the honour of my converſion; yet I muſt obſerve, that it was principally effected by my private reflections; and I ſtill remember my ſolitary tranſport at the diſcovery of a philoſophical argument againſt the doctrine of tranſubſtantiation: that the text of ſcripture, which ſeems to inculcate the real preſence, is atteſted only by a ſingle ſenſe—our ſight; while the real preſence itſelf, is diſproved by three of our ſenſes—the ſight, the touch, and the taſte.

"The

"The various articles of the Romish creed dif-
"appeared like a dream, and, after a full con-
"viction, on Christmas-day 1754, I received the
"sacrament in the church of Lausanne. It was
"here that I *suspended* my religious enquiries, ac-
"quiescing with *implicit belief* in the *tenets* and
"*mysteries*, which are adopted by the general
"consent of Catholics and Protestants."

To this *suspension* of enquiry, this *implicit* belief, we are to ascribe Mr. Gibbon's infidelity. Had his strong powers of intellect been employed in investigating the nature and evidences of Christianity, the most happy consequences might have ensued; but he appears to have given himself no further trouble on the subject. Like many other unbelievers, mistaking the corruptions of religion for religion itself, he rejected it with indignation, and deemed it unworthy of his attention. In mysticism, in popery, and in those protestant systems most nearly allied to popery by the absurdity of their tenets, and the intolerance of their spirit, Mr. Gibbon believed, or affected to believe, he saw the *whole* of revealed religion. Is it then wonderful that a person of his superior discernment should treat such a religion with the sneer of ridicule, and with the bitterness of contempt? Mr. Gibbon, in his journal, specifies the numerous volumes which he perused, but no mention is made of his having read any able defence or judicious

judicious explication of the Chriſtian religion. If his prejudice againſt divines prevented him from looking into their writings, he might have had recourſe to the productions of laymen. Grotius, Haller, Addiſon, Hartley, Weſt, Jennyns, and Lyttelton, have explained and defended the religion of Chriſt. Theſe were men of the firſt abilities, and of diſtinguiſhed reputation.

Dr. Prieſtley having, in his *Hiſtory of the Corruptions of Chriſtianity*, animadverted on Mr. Gibbon, ſent him a copy of that work upon its publication, and invited him to an amicable diſcuſſion of the ſubject. This invitation *he declined to accept*, and the correſpondence which paſſed between them is to be found at the end of a volume of Diſcourſes on *the Evidences of Revelation*, by Dr. Prieſtley, and among *the Letters of Mr. Gibbon*, lately publiſhed by Lord Sheffield. Whatever the impartial reader may think of this correſpondence—it is evident that the hiſtorian was very angry with the philoſopher for inviting him to diſcuſs the evidences of Chriſtianity, thereby reducing him to the diſagreeable neceſſity either of ſitting down to the ſtudy of revelation, or of making an aukward refuſal of it.

The character of Mr. Gibbon, drawn up in a periodical publication, appears to be exceedingly juſt, and that part of it which is immediately connected with our preſent ſubject

ſhall be here introduced. After having given the hiſtorian his due portion of praiſe, that ſenſible writer thus ſpeaks of the poſthumous volumes publiſhed by Lord Sheffield:

" * The account given in theſe volumes of his " courſe of reading, renders it probable that the " hiſtorian never found leiſure for ſuch a regu- " lar courſe of inveſtigation as might be neceſ- " ſary to form the *accurate* philoſopher. Mr. G. " certainly did not engage in ſuch a courſe at " Oxford, where, according to his account, the " ſum of his improvement was confined to three " or four Latin plays; at Lauſanne, his early " purſuits were more literary than ſcientific; " and afterwards his time was too much oc- " cupied in hiſtorical reſearches and labours to " leave much leiſure for digeſting ſyſtems of " metaphyſics, THEOLOGY, politics, or morals. " Accordingly, with reſpect to RELIGION, we " find him rather touching the ſubject with the " playful hand of ſarcaſm, than entering into " any ſerious diſcuſſion of its authority;—he " declined accepting the challenge given him by " Dr. Prieſtley, to engage in a regular contro- " verſy, on the evidences of Chriſtianity, and " except a few caſual ſtrokes, rather of *wit* than " *argument*, we find ſcarcely any thing theolo-

* Analytical Review for October 1796.

" gical

" gical through the whole courſe of theſe " papers."

This appears to be a juſt portrait of Mr. Gibbon, eſpecially as it reſpects divinity—and were every one of his readers to keep theſe obſervations in mind—few, very few, would be injured by his ſuperficial but contemptuous treatment of the Chriſtian religion.

Thus have we endeavoured to ſhew how far the circumſtances attending the two firſt periods of Mr. G's life contributed towards his infidelity *.

But we haſten to the third and laſt portion of Mr. Gibbon's life, which paſſed from his return from Lauſanne, in 1758, to his death in 1794.

He now became very ambitious of fame, and was exceedingly deſirous of making a figure in the literary world. While the two former periods of his life prevented him from becoming acquainted with *true* religion, this latter period ſeems to have given him a total diſreliſh for it.

* Mr. Gibbon, deſirous of juſtifying his own ſcepticiſm, inſinuates, that the great *Chillingworth*, after his converſion from Popery, ſubſided into an indifference towards all kinds of religion. But this inſinuation is unfounded—and the *Monthly Review*, with its uſual accuracy, noticed it in the review of his Memoirs. In *the Life of Chillingworth*, which is minutely written, no ſuſpicions are raiſed of his ſcepticiſm—nor do his laſt converſations with Dr. Cheynell, at Chicheſter Palace, previous to his diſſolution, intimate any thing of the kind.

Smitten with the love of diſtinction, he undervalued that temper of mind which is moſt congenial with the humble and unaſſuming ſpirit of the goſpel. When he ſat down therefore to deſcribe the conduct of *the firſt Chriſtians* in his Roman Hiſtory, was it poſſible for an individual of his habits not to contemplate them with the jaundiced eye of prejudice? To Mr. Gibbon, with whom *fame* and *diſtinction* were the deareſt objects, *their* integrity muſt have appeared to be obſtinacy, and *their* perſeverance madneſs and folly. That the primitive Chriſtians were perfect, no one has ever pretended to aſſert. In common, with the reſt of mankind, they had their weakneſſes and imperfections. Was it fair and honourable in the hiſtorian of the Roman Empire to ſingle out theſe weakneſſes—to magnify theſe imperfections? He throws even their virtues into the back ground of his picture, and martyrdom, the moſt rigid and conſequently the leaſt ſuſpicious teſt of their integrity, is aſcribed to unworthy and unjuſtifiable motives.

Had not the hiſtorian been blinded by prejudice, what a ſcope was afforded him for the diſplay of his eloquence, in delineating the character of the primitive Chriſtians! The rational firmneſs of their principles, and the general purity of their practice, were matter for ample commendation. Theſe followers of Chriſt were

deſtined

deſtined to combat enemies the moſt formidable, and to endure ſufferings the moſt exquiſite. The Jews, favoured by heaven beyond any other people, were unwilling to relinquiſh a diſpenſation, which, while it had ſecured to them the choiceſt temporal bleſſings, elevated them to a high rank among the nations of the earth. The Gentiles, accuſtomed to their multifarious deities, and indulging themſelves in every ſpecies of licentiouſneſs, ſhrunk back from a religion, which, while it taught this ſimple truth, *one God, and one Mediator, the man Chriſt Jeſus*, ſolemnly inculcated the ſtricteſt purity of heart. Between theſe two bodies of people, the Chriſtians found it exceedingly difficult to maintain a due medium. The Jew, with his ceremonial obſervances, and the Gentile, with his ſyſtems of philoſophy, were continually obtruding theſe favourite objects on their notice and attention. We may then ſuppoſe, that the primitive Chriſtians, thus circumſtanced, were guilty of occaſional deviations from the great ſtandard of faith and practice. This part of their conduct Mr. Gibbon might have cenſured, without expoſing their *whole* character to deriſion and contempt.

But, for a refutation of Mr. Gibbon's account of the Chriſtian religion, contained in the 15th and 16th chapters of his Roman Hiſtory, the reader is referred to the animadverſions of his three principal opponents, the Biſhop of Landaff, Lord Hales,

Hales, and Mr. Davies; to the latter of whom Mr. Gibbon returned a profeſſed anſwer. The five *human* cauſes to which the hiſtorian aſcribed the propagation of the Chriſtian faith, are by theſe writers fully examined, and the indecorous mode of his attack properly reprehended. But there is another very reſpectable writer, who, though he did not draw his pen againſt Mr. Gibbon, yet has, in a few words, characteriſed his account of religion with ſo much juſtice, that it ſhall be here inſerted:

"I have been reading (ſays Dr. Archibald "Maclaine, in his Letters to Soame Jennyns, "Eſq.) the account given by Mr. Edward Gib- "bon, of the progreſs of the Chriſtian religion, "in which the *graveſt* ſubjects, and one of the "*graveſt* kinds of writing, are both *diſhonoured* by "a perpetual and unneceſſary ſneer. I ſay an "*unneceſſary* ſneer, becauſe Mr. Gibbon lives in "a country where a man may write and ſpeak "as he thinks, without danger of moleſtation. "He was therefore under no neceſſity of aping "the manner of ſome of the French philoſo- "phers (as they are pleaſed to call themſelves) "who cover their infidelity with a ſedate and well "diſguiſed irony, to eſcape the ſecular arm of "religious perſecution. It is true, a ſneer may "have its place and time; but ſurely its *place* "cannot be *hiſtorical* narrative, through which, at "leaſt,

" leaſt, it never ought to reign; nor is it a *time*
" to ſneer, when *Chriſtianity* is the ſubject of diſ-
" cuſſion, becauſe *this religion* has a profeſſed
" relation to the *moſt ſolemn and important* inte-
" reſts, and has, in effect, been a ſource of con-
" ſolation and hope to the *wiſeſt* of mankind in
" all ages."

Thus have we attempted to account for the infidelity of the late Edward Gibbon, Eſq. The immediate cauſes *ſeem* to have been the neglect of his religious education—the diſguſt he received from the corruptions of Chriſtianity, and the love of eminence by which his mind was heated and inflamed. Hence originated that contempt for revelation which is diſcernible throughout various parts of his writings. By ſome minds, perhaps, theſe cauſes of Mr. Gibbon's ſcepticiſm will not be regarded, and therefore they will perſiſt in paying the ſame attention to the unjuſt account of religion which he has given us in the firſt volume of his Roman Hiſtory. With others, however, it is preſumed, this curſory ſurvey of the Hiſtorian's Memoirs may have conſiderable weight—teaching them at leaſt to read him with caution, and to diſtruſt his delineation of the religion of Jeſus Chriſt. To young perſons, this *leſſon of caution* may prove peculiarly ſerviceable—for youth, unapprized of any lurking danger, and charmed with Mr. Gibbon's

bon's lively and elegant ſtyle, may be ſeduced to ſwallow the poiſon of infidelity, and vain, oftentimes, is every effort for its expulſion.

Upon the Memoirs of the late Edward Gibbon, Eſq. a variety of other obſervations might be hazarded, but I ſhall cloſe this part with juſt remarking, that a man of his genius, and ſenſibility, ſuſtained a heavy loſs, even in this life, from his diſbelief of the Chriſtian religion. " *The* " *preſent* (ſays Mr. Gibbon, in the concluſion " of his Memoirs) *is a fleeting moment—the* " *paſt is no more—and our proſpect of futurity* " *dark and doubtful.* This day may *poſſibly* " be my laſt, but the laws of probability, ſo true " in general—ſo fallacious in particular, ſtill " allow about fifteen years. I ſhall ſoon enter " into the period, which, as the moſt agreeable " of his long life, was ſelected by the judgment " and experience of the ſage Fontenelle. His " choice is approved by the eloquent hiſtorian " of nature, who fixes our moral happineſs to " the mature ſeaſon in which our paſſions are " ſuppoſed to be calmed, our duties fulfilled, " our ambition ſatisfied, our fame and fortune " eſtabliſhed on a ſolid baſis. In private con- " verſation, that great and amiable man added " the weight of his own experience; and this " autumnal felicity might be exemplified in the " lives of Voltaire, Hume, and many other

" men

" men of letters. I am far more inclined to
" embrace than to diſpute this comfortable doc-
" trine. I will not ſuppoſe any premature de-
" cay of mind or body; but I muſt *reluctantly* ob-
" ſerve, that two cauſes, the abbreviation of
" time, and the failure of hope, will always tinge
" with a *browner* ſhade the evening of life."
Brown indeed muſt be the *ſhade* of the evening of that life, which has not been enlightened by the doctrines, regulated by the precepts, and cheered by the hopes of the Chriſtian religion. Nor is it the evening of life *alone* that feels the abſence of revelation. In the ſucceſſive ſtages of our earthly pilgrimage, various are the diſtreſſes by which our peace and comfort are aſſailed. Had Mr. Gibbon confided in a ſuperintending providence, he would not have haraſſed himſelf with an unreaſonable anxiety for futurity; and had he believed in a ſtate of future happineſs, he would have given up his friends with leſs reluctance, and have followed them, with the eye of faith, and with tears of joy, to thoſe regions where he ſhould ſpeedily rejoin them, and where the pang of ſeparation ſhall never be experienced. Under the loſs of his beloved Deyverdun of his aunt Porter, and of his friend, Lady Sheffield, it is affecting to obſerve, in his letters, how the feelings of the heart ſtruggled with the ſcepticiſm of the Hiſtorian. Speaking of

 the

the death of his aunt Porter, Mr. Gibbon ſays, in a letter to Lord Sheffield, " as I grew up, an intercourſe of *thirty* years, endeared her to me, as the faithful friend, and the agreeable companion. You have ſeen with what freedom and confidence we lived together, and have often admired her character and converſation, which could alike pleaſe the young and the old. *All* this is now loſt, *finally, irrecoverably* loſt! I will agree with my Lady, that the *immortality of the ſoul* is, at ſome times, a *very comfortable doctrine.*" In a letter alſo to the ſame Nobleman—ſympathiſing with him on the death of his Lady, Mr. Gibbon remarks—" Alas, what is life, and what are our hopes and projects? When I embraced her at your departure from Lauſanne, could I imagine that it was for the laſt time? When I poſtponed to another ſummer my journey to England, could I apprehend that I *never, never* ſhould ſee her again? In four days, in your abſence, in that of her children! But ſhe is now at reſt, and *if there be a future life*, her mild virtues have ſurely entitled her to the reward of pure and perfect felicity. I know *the impotence of reaſon*, and I much fear that the ſtrength of your character will ſerve to make a ſharper and more laſting impreſſion." In ſuch moments, one would have imagined that the ſoul of Mr. Gibbon muſt have melted in favour of that ſublime religion, which

brought

brought life and immortality to light! But apparently determined not to be indebted to the Chriſtian revelation, he contented himſelf with the cold conſolations of philoſophy, unmindful of Pope's memorable declaration to Biſhop Atterbury: "The boy deſpiſes the infant, the man the boy, the *Philoſopher* both, and the CHRISTIAN *all**."

Having thus attempted to trace the cauſes of Mr. Gibbon's ſcepticiſm, without imputing to the evidences of our religion any defect, which is the caſe with moſt unbelievers—the ſubject might be here diſmiſſed. But unfortunately theſe cauſes operate, in different degrees, on the minds of many others, to the diminution of their own comfort, and to the great detriment of ſociety.

A few reflections, therefore, ſhall be offered, on the beſt means of checking the preſent alarm-

* Mr. Gibbon's Memoirs cloſe with the year 1788. He expired ſuddenly at his lodgings in St. James's-ſtreet, London, the 16th of January, 1794. In his ſhort illneſs he never gave the leaſt intimation of a future ſtate of exiſtence. This inſenſibility at the hour of diſſolution is, in the language of ſcepticiſm dying *the death of a philoſopher!* See Mr. Gibbon's mention of the Death of David Hume, Eſq. Memoirs, page 150.

ing progreſs of ſcepticiſm, and of irreligion. Theſe means are partly ſuggeſted by the preceding review of Mr. Gibbon's Memoirs. And though they have been again and again recommended—yet it is imagined, that when they are thus brought forward, in connection with the caſe and conduct of ſo celebrated an unbeliever —they acquire an additional importance.

1. We cannot help being ſtruck with the great utility of a religious education. Mr. Gibbon was bleſſed with a luminous genius, and poſſeſſed talents of a ſuperior kind. Had this genius, and theſe talents, been directed at an early period to the religion of Chriſt, ſuch a procedure might have been attended with inconceivable advantages. Here he might have expatiated without controul, and have ſatiated himſelf with the beauty and ſublimity of its reſpective objects. The doctrines, precepts, examples, rewards, and puniſhments exhibited in the Scriptures, would have afforded ample matter for admiration and delight. The example of Jeſus Chriſt, remarkable for its ſimplicity and purity, would have claimed his particular attention. Upon the minds of youth, it is adapted to make the moſt advantageous impreſſions. It is then much to be regretted, that Mr. Gibbon ſhould not have applied himſelf, in his earlieſt years,

years, to the ſtudy of a religion ſo ſuperlatively pure and excellent.

Mr. Gibbon's early predilection for hiſtory, might alſo have been abundantly gratified in the ſacred writings. From Geneſis to Revelations, he would have contemplated the grandeſt events, unfolding themſelves in regular ſucceſſion—and the light of Heaven communicated according to the different exigencies of the human race. During the Adamical, Patriarchal, and Jewiſh diſpenſations, knowledge was imparted with a ſparing hand. But when *Jeſus Chriſt*, the MESSIAH, appeared, HE, on account of the intelligence brought with him, reſpecting the perfections and government of God—the nature of the preſent ſtate—and the deſtinies of a future world, is emphatically ſtiled, a *light* or LUMINARY *to enlighten the Gentiles!* Mr. Gibbon ſhould have been taught by his parents and tutors to trace theſe events, according to the order in which they had ſucceſſively ariſen. This might have confirmed his faith in the exiſtence and providence of God, and thus would his mind, when matured, have been prepared for a cordial reception of Chriſtianity. The firſt trial, which Dr. William Robertſon (the great Scottiſh Hiſtorian) made of his hiſtorical talents, was in a ſermon, on the propriety of the period which infinite wiſdom had choſen for the appearance of the

the Meſſiah, in the land of Judea. This propriety was happily ſhewn by a retroſpective ſurvey of the ſtate and manners of the ſurrounding nations *.

It may not be improper to remind youth, that the ſacred narrative is not only more authentic than many parts of profane hiſtory, but extends back to a much earlier period. Solomon's Temple was built more than 250 years before the foundation of Rome was laid; ſo that the Jews had reached the height of their glory, when the Romans, who afterwards became the maſters of the world, had not even an exiſtence in the earth.

* In the introduction to this Diſcourſe, it is juſtly remarked, "that there is no employment more delightful to a devout mind, than the contemplation of the divine wiſdom in the government of the world. The civil hiſtory of mankind opens a wide field for this pious exerciſe. Careful obſervers, may often, by the light of reaſon, form probable conjectures with regard to the plan of God's Providence, and diſcover a ſkilful hand, directing the revolutions of human affairs, and compaſſing the beſt ends, by the moſt effectual and ſurpriſing means. But *Sacred Hiſtory*, by drawing aſide that veil which covers the councils of the Almighty, lays open his deſigns to the views of his creatures, and we can trace the ſteps which he taketh towards them with more certainty and greater pleaſure. The facts, which *inſpired writers* relate, are no leſs inſtructive than the doctrines which they teach. The latter inform us, that God is powerful, wiſe, and good; the former diſcover theſe perfections brought forth into action, and confirm ſpeculative opinions by real and ſtriking examples." *See the Scotch Preacher, Vol. I.*

"*Varro*

" *Varro** alſo divided the whole ſeries of time into three periods. The firſt extended from the creation of the world to the Deluge, and is by him called the *Unknown Age*, there being nothing in profane hiſtorians relative to that time, which has any appearance of truth. The ſecond period reached from the Deluge to the firſt Olympiad, and this is what he ſtiles the *Fabulous*. The third and laſt, beginning with the firſt Olympiad, was carried down to the age in which the author wrote *. He calls it the *Hiſtorical* period, becauſe, henceforward the tranſactions of mankind are handed down to us by faithful and authentic relations; ſo that the Olympiads, while they conſtitute the great epoch of the Greeks, are at the ſame time to be conſidered as the Æra of true hiſtory. However, this holds only in reſpect of the tranſactions of the heathen world, inaſmuch as *Holy Writ* furniſhes a true and authentic relation of the affairs of the choſen people, from the times of Abraham the father and founder of the Jewiſh nation, and has even traced things back, in a general ſummary, to the firſt formation of the univerſe." Now the *Olympiads* commenced, in the 3,228th year of the world. So that, according to this ſtatement, for ſome of the principal events and tranſactions of the firſt *three thouſand* years, we are indebted alone to the records of inſpiration.

* *Varro* flouriſhed a few years before the birth of Chriſt.

When

When we expatiate on the advantages of a religious education, we advert to the *probable* good effects of ſuch a mode of inſtruction. Inſtances there have been, where it has not been in the power of the beſt education to reſtrain certain eccentricities of the intellect, and to correct certain propenſities of the heart. But this is no argument againſt the truth of Solomon's declaration—*Train up a child in the way he ſhould go, and he will not depart from it.* By this adage we are to underſtand, that a child, thus *trained*, or diſciplined, will not *eaſily* ſtray from the path of duty. Indeed it is aſcertained, that a religious education has been the means not only of arreſting in their career thoſe who had deviated from what was right—but had alſo been the means of accelerating their return. Many examples of this kind might be produced, and the reader, who is converſant with biographical narratives, will eaſily recollect them. One inſtance, however, is too remarkable to be omitted on the preſent occaſion. Gilbert Weſt, Eſq. writing to Dr. Doddridge, and ſpeaking of *the life of Colonel Gardiner*, then juſt publiſhed—obſerves, " I cannot help taking notice of your remarks upon the advantage of an *early education in the principles of religion*, becauſe I have myſelf *moſt happily* experienced it. Since I owe to the early care of a moſt excellent woman, my mother, that bent and bias to religion, which, with the co-operating

co-operating grace of God, hath at length *brought me back* to thoſe *paths of peace* from whence I might have otherwiſe been in danger of deviating *for ever*."—Mr. Weſt was a gentleman of the moſt amiable manners, and eminent for his cultivation of polite literature. The latter clauſe of the above remarkable paſſage, alludes to his having been once ſeduced into infidelity; but he ingenuouſly confeſſes how much he was indebted to *a pious education*—which were the means, according to his own account, of bringing him back to the love and practice of the Chriſtian religion. The remonſtrances of conſcience, invigorated by previous knowledge, are, in moſt caſes, irreſiſtible *.

The education of youth, then, in the principles of religion, is one of the primary duties incumbent on the profeſſors of Chriſtianity. Of late, it has attracted conſiderable attention, from Parents and Miniſters, both in the eſtabliſhed Church, and among the Proteſtant Diſſenters. The benefits accruing from a practice ſo truly

* To *Mr. Weſt* the public are indebted for a valuable treatiſe, entitled, *Obſervations on the Reſurrection of Chriſt*—and for a tranſlation of *Pindar's Odes*, which Dr. Johnſon declares to be "the product of great labour, and great abilities."—Speaking alſo of Mr. Weſt's death, he remarks, that (on March the 26th, 1756) "a ſtroke of the palſy brought to the grave one of *the few poets* to whom *the grave* might be without its *terrors*."—See Johnſon's Lives of the Poets, vol. 4th.

apoſtolic, will be experienced by generations yet unborn. But let it not be imagined, that, by inſtructing youth in the principles of religion—is meant the dogmas of a ſect, or the peculiarities of a party—no; let their tender minds be impregnated with large and liberal views of the Chriſtian religion. Its pure nature—ample evidences—and liberal tendency, conſtitute the choiceſt materials of inſtruction. For want of this initiation, our youth are frequently left a prey to ignorance and prejudice, evils, which, if we feel any concern for the peace and comfort of the riſing generation, ought to be ſeriouſly deprecated!*

Family worſhip, though greatly neglected by

* The eighteenth century teems with productions for the improvement of young people. Mrs. Trimmer's SACRED HISTORY, is a work of conſiderable merit and reputation. To Mrs. Barbauld's elegant pen, youth are alſo indebted for many very uſeful publications. *Catechetical Exerciſes*, by the Rev. Charles Bulkeley, is a production (though little known) that would be found very ſerviceable to tutors and heads of families. Like the other performances, of that venerable author, it is characteriſed by ſound ſenſe, and unaffected piety. But, to ſpecify diſtinctly, what has been within theſe few years written for the inſtruction of youth, will not be here expected. Indeed, if the youth of this age be only attentive to ſuch publications—and their parents and tutors aſſiduous in the diſcharge of their duty towards them—the next generation *muſt* be greatly ſuperior to the preſent, in knowledge, virtue, and piety.

the profeſſors of Chriſtianity, may be deemed a ſpecies of *religious education*, than which nothing can be more beneficial to the riſing generation. Hence has it been obſerved, that "it is a moſt proper way of teaching children religion, as you teach them language, by inſenſible degrees—a little one day, and a little another—for to them, *line muſt be upon line, and precept upon precept.*" This remark is peculiarly juſt. For does not prayer conſiſt of various parts and branches, which are adapted to make their ſeveral impreſſions on the ſuſceptible minds of youth? The *daily* enumeration of the divine perfections, the confeſſion of ſins, petitions for mercy, and expreſſions of truſt and confidence in the providence of God, are likely to influence favourably the young and tender mind. Under ſuch impreſſions, children will grow up into ſerious and well-informed Chriſtians. Parents are ſeldom negligent of their childrens' temporal welfare. But does *this* compriſe their *all?* What! when you have heaped up riches for your offspring, is parental obligation *wholly* diſcharged? Depend upon it, that valuable as wealth is to procure the neceſſaries, the conveniences, and the elegancies of life; yet even *this wealth*, is *dearly* purchaſed by the neglect of virtue and of religion. In this life, God withholds not from *the pious*, tokens of his approbation. But to a

future ſtate, Revelation teaches both individuals and families to look for their peculiar reward. This truth ſhould be contemplated with no ſmall degree of complacency. Here, on earth, families, however endeared to each other, are gradually diſperſed when their young members reach maturity, and are finally ſeparated by death. But in Heaven, our *pious relatives and friends* meet to ſeparate no more! Have you not beheld the repreſentation of *a pious family* riſing from the dead at the laſt day? Never was the pencil more nobly employed than in depicting this intereſting ſcene. In the countenances of the ſeveral individuals, the paſſions of devotion and of ſurpriſe are ſweetly mingled, whilſt the tomb itſelf ſeems ſpontaneouſly to rend aſunder, unwilling as it were, to detain any longer, its illuſtrious captives!

2. We ſhould be careful to diveſt religion of thoſe corruptions which have been added to it by the weakneſs or wickedneſs of mankind.

" To conſider the ſyſtem (if it may be called a *ſyſtem)* of Chriſtianity *a priori*, we are led to think it, (ſays a celebrated divine writing againſt Mr. Gibbon) very little liable to corruption or abuſe. The great outline of it is, that the univerſal parent of mankind, commiſſioned Jeſus Chriſt to invite men to the practice of virtue, by the aſſurance of his mercy to the penitent,

and

and of his purpoſe, to raiſe to immortal life and happineſs, all the virtuous and the good, but to inflict an adequate puniſhment on the wicked. In proof of this, he wrought many miracles, and, after a public execution, he roſe again from the dead. He alſo directed, that proſelytes to his religion ſhould be admitted by *baptiſm*, and that his diſciples ſhould eat bread and drink wine, in commemoration of his death."

It was however predicted by its great founder, that this ſimple and pure religion would be debaſed by adventitious mixtures. What was thus predicted has aſſuredly come to paſs, and is a collateral proof of its divinity. Idle and metaphyſical diſtinctions have been ſubſtituted inſtead of ſound doctrine. Silly and ſenſeleſs ceremonies have uſurped the place of rational and uſeful precepts. TRUTH has been diſfigured by enthuſiaſm, and encumbered by ſuperſtition. This is too much the caſe with many ſects and denominations. But of all theological ſyſtems, Popery, by the abſurdity of its doctrines, and the intolerance of its ſpirit, recedes the fartheſt from the purity and ſimplicity of the Goſpel *.

* See *Burrough's View of Popery*, taken from the Creed of Pope Pius the IVth.—Juſtice, however, requires it to be obſerved, that among the modern Papiſts there is a claſs who reject the ſupremacy of the Pope, and other Romiſh tenets. They entitle themſelves *Catholics*, or *Catholic Diſſenters*, and are diſtinguiſhed for freedom of thought, and liberality of ſentiment.

Even

Even in the apoſtolic age, error began to rear its head, and ſoon after the aſcenſion of Chriſt, the doctrines of revelation were refined by the reveries of Heathen Philoſophers. Moſheim, in his Eccleſiaſtical Hiſtory, ſpeaks largely and feelingly on this melancholy ſubject. The ſyſtem of Plato, (one of the moſt popular of the ancient ſages) had too predominant an influence over the Chriſtian converts, and thus was the ſimplicity of their religion gradually adulterated. Its ſubſequent alliance with the powers of this world, proved alſo prejudicial, in more reſpects than one, and its corruptions grew to that enormous height, that it became at length the terror and curſe of the earth. Ignorance and vice were the traits by which many of its votaries were diſtinguiſhed, and this, with a few exceptions, was the only Chriſtianity exhibited to the world for a ſeries of ages *.

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* The centuries which immediately followed the converſion of Conſtantine, are marked by the *degeneracy* of Chriſtians, both in faith and practice. John Alph. Turretine, in his admirable *Compendium of Eccleſiaſtical Hiſtory*, deſcribes, at the cloſe of theſe centuries, the character of each, in a few words. As theſe reſpective delineations may prove inſtructive to the ſtudent of divinity, a few of them are here tranſcribed, and will ſhew that the above ſtatement of religion, in thoſe times, is not dictated by an unjuſt ſeverity. Century 4th. Opes ac dignitates Imperatorum munificentiâ in Eccleſiam collatæ, in ſuperbiæ fœdique ambitus irritamentum ceſſêre.

Century

The REFORMATION, therefore, which was brought about by Luther, and his aſſociates, at the commencement of the ſixteenth century, rendered an eſſential ſervice to the civil and religious intereſts of mankind. Many ſpeculative abſurdities were then exploded, and many ſuperſtitious practices laid aſide. For the times, the Reformers accompliſhed wonders; but it would be unnatural to ſuppoſe, that they left nothing to be atchieved by others. The progreſs of reformation is ſlow and gradual, nor is it a ſmall taſk to combat, ſucceſsfully, the preju-

Century 5th. Mores Chriſtianorum quàm corrupti fuerint, quàmque alieni à Chriſti Legibus, vel ex uno *Salviano* conſtare poteſt. Century 6th. Eccleſiæ ſtatum indies pejorem, Gregorius ille non malè deſcribit, dum eam navi putreſcenti, et naufragium minanti, adſimilat. Century 7th. Non mirum ſi ſuperſtitio, ignorantiæ comes aſſidua, paribus augmentis creverit; nec niſi in condendis Baſilicis, Monaſteriis extruendis atque ditandis, imaginibus, reliquiis, crucibus, veſtibus, tonſuris, jejuniis, aliiſque idgenus ineptiis, tota fermè horum temporum pietas collocata ſit. Century 8th. Superſtitionis in Imagines, Cruces, Reliquias, aliáque idgenus, tota hujus ſeculi hiſtoria perpetuum documentum. Century the 10th. Seculi decimi ita horrida deformiſque facies fuit, ob tetram ignorantiam, moreſque perditiſſimos, ut *obſcurum* atque *infelix*, *ferreum* et *plumbeum* vulgo appelletur. Certè plurimos Romanorum Pontificum, non homines ſed *monſtra*, adeo in omne libidinum ac ſcelerum genus ruebant apud omnes etiam cauſſæ Pontificiæ addictiſſimos; in confeſſo eſt.—What a melancholy picture of the Chriſtian religion! How is the gold become dim, and the fine gold changed!

dices

dices and paſſions of mankind. The reformers, however, eſtabliſhed two great truths, *the ſufficiency of ſcripture as a rule of faith*, and, *the right of private judgment to interpret its contents*. Proteſtants, therefore, have ſecured to themſelves thoſe principles which are requiſite to the inveſtigation of truth, and the individuals who have adopted them, have, in their diſcuſſions, led the way to a pure and rational religion. To ſuch a religion, purged of all extraneous mixtures, Unbelievers ſhould direct their attention. It deſerves, and will bear the ſtricteſt examination.

The corruption of religion, whether effected by Papiſts or Proteſtants, begets a contempt for religion itſelf. This appears to have been the caſe with Mr. Gibbon, and with other unbelievers, equally eminent for their genius and erudition. But can any paſſion be more unfriendly than *contempt*, to the inveſtigation of truth? So convinced is Mr. Paley of this poſition, that in his chapter on the *Rejection of Chriſtianity* *, he heſitates not to declare—"The infidelity of the Gentile world, and that more eſpecially of men of rank and learning in it, is reſolvable into a principle, which, in my judgment, will account for the inefficacy of any argument, or any evidence whatever, viz. *contempt*, prior to exa-

* View of the Evidences of Chriſtianity.

mination."

mination." He alſo adds, in the ſame chapter, —" that this *contempt*, prior to examination, is an *intellectual vice*, from which the greateſt faculties of mind are not free. I know not, indeed, whether men of the *greateſt faculties of mind* are not *the moſt ſubject* to it. Such men feel themſelves ſeated upon an eminence. Looking down from their height upon the follies of mankind, they behold contending tenets waſting their idle ſtrength upon one another, with a common diſdain of the abſurdity of them all. This habit of thought, however comfortable to the mind which entertains it, or however natural to *great parts*, is *extremely dangerous*, and more apt than almoſt any other diſpoſition, to produce *haſty* and *contemptuous*, and by conſequence *erroneous* judgment, both of perſons and of opinions." Unbelievers, however, are not to be juſtified in this contempt—whilſt thoſe individuals incur an awful reſponſibility, who, having incorporated with Chriſtianity what does not belong to it, prejudice the minds of men againſt revelation, and precipitate them into the gulph of infidelity *!

Inexcuſable

* Let no one imagine that this mode of reaſoning, concerning the corruptions of Chriſtianity, is peculiar to *diſſenters*. It has been adopted both in the laſt and preſent century, by ſome of the moſt diſtinguiſhed members of the *Eſtabliſhed Church*. The Biſhop of Landaff remarks, in his reply to Mr. Gibbon—" There are many *worthleſs* doctrines, many *ſuperſtitious*

Inexcuſable are thoſe Proteſtants, who having renounced the infallibility of the Papal chair, together with the abſurdities of implicit faith, exerciſe not the faculty of reaſon, in their ſearch after divine truth. *Reaſon*, however depreciated by the fanatic, is to be employed in aſcertaining the nature, the evidences, and the tendency of the goſpel. An inveſtigation of this kind, conducted *in the fear of God*, produces the moſt valuable conſequences. True religion ſuffers not by the ſevereſt ſcrutiny. Emerging from beneath thoſe clouds, with which it had been enveloped by the votaries of enthuſiaſm and of ſuperſtition, it breaks out with renovated luſtre, and, attracted by its divine amiableneſs, thouſands will flee to it, *as all their ſalvation and all their deſire.* Contemplating it before, through the diſtorted medium of prejudice, they now come forward with alacrity, and with the apoſtle Paul, confeſs it to be *the power of God unto ſalvation, to every one that believeth!*

ſtitious obſervances, which the fraud or folly of mankind have *every where* annexed to Chriſtianity (eſpecially in the Church of Rome) as eſſential parts of it; if you take theſe *ſorry appendages* to Chriſtianity, for Chriſtianity itſelf, as preached by Chriſt, and by the apoſtles; if you confound the Roman with the Chriſtian religion, you quite miſapprehend its nature; and are in a ſtate ſimilar to that of men mentioned by Plutarch, in his Treatiſe on Superſtition, who flying from ſuperſtition leaped over religion, and ſunk into downright Atheiſm." *Apology for Chriſtianity*, Letter the 6th.

Let

Let us then be careful, that we aſſert no one thing to be an article either of our religious faith or practice, which is not *explicitly* revealed in the word of God. And when, confining ourſelves to what is revealed, let us be alſo careful to aſſign to each truth, no more importance than is ſtrictly due to it. For want of attending to theſe two obvious maxims, have ariſen thoſe idle diſputes and ſavage controverſies which have at times converted the Chriſtian amphitheatre into a field of blood. Such unnatural jarrings have broken the hearts of good men, and have afforded the Unbeliever, matter of ſcorn and of deriſion. This, Chriſtians, has not unfrequently been the diſgrace of your holy religion! Uncharitableneſs and diviſions lay waſte the church of God. Were it not under the immediate protection of its divine founder, it muſt have long ago been completely overturned. But Jeſus Chriſt, who aſſured his diſciples—*A new commandment give I unto you, that ye love one another*—will, we truſt, allay our animoſities, and inſpire us with that love of peace, and of purity, for which he himſelf, during his abode on earth, was eminently diſtinguiſhed *.

3. Another

* It is almoſt impoſſible for mankind to entertain juſt notions of the Chriſtian religion, or for its profeſſors of different ſentiments to indulge towards each other a charitable ſpirit, whilſt they confine their attention to *human ſyſtems* of faith.

3. Another mean of checking the preſent progreſs of ſcepticiſm, and of irreligion, will be the preſerving of our minds from an undue attachment to the world.

It is not the intention of the Chriſtian religion to take us from amidſt the occupations of ſociety, and to impriſon us within the walls of a convent. Endued with ſocial principles, we are placed by our Creator in a ſituation where thoſe principles may expand themſelves, and receive their proper gratification. But it is the lot of humanity to incline to exceſs, and unleſs we exerciſe over ourſelves an habitual vigilance, our happineſs is embittered, and liable to be deſtroyed. Religion therefore ſteps in, moſt ſeaſonably, to controul this propenſity to exceſs, and in a meaſure to elevate us above the ſmiles and frowns of the world. Diſtracted by an intemperate attachment to the concerns of life, we incapacitate ourſelves for the reception of religious truth. How is it poſſible for a man to receive

We muſt reflect on what religion *was* in the days of Chriſt, and his apoſtles—not on what it is now ſaid to be, by ſome of their followers. When we contemplate religious parties, wedded to their peculiar dogmas—it reminds us of honeſt William Whiſton's remark concerning good Biſhop Gibſon —"He ſeemed to think, that the Church of England *as it juſt then happened to be eſtabliſhed by modern laws and cuſtoms*—came down from heaven; with the Athanaſian Creed in its hand!" *Biographical Dictionary*. Article, *Gibſon*.

thoſe

thoſe doctrines which relate to ETERNITY, when the manner of employing himſelf makes him forget that there *is* ſuch an *Eternity?* or how can an individual duly prepare for *the world to come*, if *the world that now is* engroſſes the *whole* of his attention? That this is the caſe with thouſands of the human race, cannot be queſtioned, and that a perſon, enſlaved by this exceſſive influence, muſt neceſſarily neglect the nature and evidences of religion, is equally obvious. In the New Teſtament, therefore, a line of demarcation is drawn betwixt the diſciples of Chriſt, and the diſciples of the world. Our Saviour aſſerted this diſtinction, and the apoſtles, in their letters to the primitive churches, often allude to it. Chriſtianity, indeed, implies ſuch a diſtinction. The objects of religion, are ſpiritual and inviſible, therefore eaſily eſcape our attention. The tendency of this religion is pure, therefore men wiſh to ſtand aloof from its influence. On the other hand, the objects of the world are viſible, therefore direct and immediate in their preſſure on our minds. The tendency of the world, in its general appearances, is to amuſe by its novelty and variety, therefore always faſcinating, though that faſcination terminates not unfrequently in diſſatisfaction. Religion and the world, are then, in theſe reſpects, hoſtile to each other, and demand in their

reſpective

reſpective votaries, an oppoſite temper and conduct. Can it therefore be ſuppoſed that the *mere* worldly man ſhould be inclined to receive with cordiality, the pure and ſpiritual religion of Chriſt?

Fame, wealth, and pleaſure, are the deities before whom mankind proſtrate themſelves, and at whoſe ſhrine they unceaſingly worſhip. To ſecure theſe objects, whoſe falſe ſplendor glitters on the eye, every nerve is ſtrained, and no experiment left untried. Nor are ſome individuals, the ſlaves of avarice or ambition, averſe to the adoption of means the moſt atrocious. For this end, laws, human and divine, have been trampled under foot, with an undiſtinguiſhed rage. Hiſtory records many deplorable inſtances of ſuch degeneracy. But we will not advert to theſe extraordinary deviations from rectitude. Mankind are *in general* prone to indulge an *exceſſive* purſuit after worldly objects. The tradeſman purſues his occupation to the excluſion of all thought and reflection concerning religion. Perſons of fortune abſorb themſelves in the chace of honour and emolument. And even the ſtudent, retired and ſecluded from the buſy world, carries to an exceſs, his paſſion for literature, and his inveſtigation of favorite topics. Can it be thought, that perſons thus wrapped up in their temporal concerns, are likely to comprehend

hend the nature, diſcern the evidences, and feel the purifying influence of the Chriſtian religion? To underſtand the arts and ſciences, much more to make a proficiency in them, a *previous temper* of mind is eſteemed abſolutely requiſite. Is revelation then ſo totally unlike every thing elſe, as to diſpenſe with preparatory qualifications? Are its principles to be *intuitively* underſtood? Or are we to be *miraculouſly* directed and impelled to the obſervance of its precepts?

One deplorable evil, generated by worldly-mindedneſs, is a neglect of public worſhip, which is not unfrequently the ſource of ſcepticiſm. The ſervices of the ſanctuary poſſeſs the ſalutary tendency of impregnating the mind of the ſincere worſhipper with the love of virtue and of piety. When, therefore, on trivial accounts, individuals abſent themſelves from religious aſſemblies, they ſink by degrees into indifference, and are afterwards deſirous of juſtifying the lukewarmneſs into which they have fallen. The minds of ſuch individuals are hereby prepared for ſcepticiſm, and a grain of infidelity flung into ſuch a ſoil, ſprings up into an abundant harveſt. By the friends and by the enemies of Chriſtianity, *this circumſtance* deſerves ſerious conſideration. To both, it ſuggeſts intereſting leſſons. For, Chriſtians, thus admoniſhed, ſhould be quickened in their zeal to diſ-

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charge this moſt important duty; and Unbelievers ſhould be led to ſuſpect a latent cauſe of that ſcepticiſm into which they have been unhappily betrayed*.

Let us then be particularly cautious what ſpirit we imbibe, and what maxims we follow. Upon thoſe who are entering on the career of life, this advice cannot be too preſſingly inculcated. Did we for a moment recollect the unſatisfactory nature, and tranſitory duration of terreſtrial objects—ſuch a recollection would cure us of an inordinate attachment. It is *exceſs*, which, preventing us from paying a due attention to

* It appears from a ſerious and pathetic addreſs, lately directed by the *Parochial Clergy of Mancheſter*, to its inhabitants, that of *ſeventy thouſand* ſouls—between *forty* and *fifty thouſand* live in the habitual neglect of religious worſhip. The inhabitants of London are eſtimated at near a MILLION—of which million, or ten hundred thouſand, perhaps more than one half—that is *more than five hundred thouſand*, are in the above awful predicament! To this neglect of public worſhip, may, in a great meaſure, be aſcribed, that alarming depravation of morals among the lower claſſes, which has recently been exhibited to the public by *a magiſtrate*, in a very ſenſible treatiſe on *The Police of the Metropolis*. Surely then, in *theſe* times the *truth of religion*, inſtead of being queſtioned, ſhould be enforced—*that religion*, which teaches us, that the eye of God penetrates into the moſt obſcure receſſes of iniquity, and that though individuals may eſcape the cognizance of earthly tribunals, yet they *muſt* appear before the tribunal of heaven, when *God ſhall judge the world in righteouſneſs!*

things

things more uſeful and important, renders the predilection criminal. Otherwiſe the ſcriptures ſpeak favourably of moderate attachments, for in this world they conſtitute a great part of that foundation on which the edifice of our happineſs is erected. True religion teaches us to enjoy with *moderation* the gifts of Providence, not to reject them with a moroſe and cynical auſterity.

" Each order of men, each condition of life, each ſociety (ſays an eloquent writer, who was an adept in the knowledge of human nature) hath ſome peculiar vice, and each of theſe is ſo eſtabliſhed by cuſtom, that we cannot reſiſt it without being accounted, according to the uſual phraſe, men of *another world*. Vicious men are ſometimes reſpectable perſons. They are parents, they are miniſters, they are magiſtrates. We bring into the world with us a turn to imitation. Our brain is ſo formed as to receive impreſſions from all exterior objects, and to take the form of every thing that affecteth it. How difficult is it to avoid contagion, when we breathe an air ſo infected! The deſire of pleaſing often prompts us to that which our inclinations abhor; and very few people can bear this reproach—you are unfaſhionable and unpolite! How much harder is it to reſiſt a torrent, when it falls in with the diſpoſition of our own hearts!

The CHRISTIAN, however, reſolutely reſiſteth this attack, and oppoſeth model to model, the patterns of Jeſus Chriſt, and of his aſſociates, to the examples of an apoſtate world *."

The 4th, and laſt reflection which ſhall be here offered to check the progreſs of ſcepticiſm and irreligion, is, that we ſhould attend to the *real deſign* of Chriſtianity.

Perſons who are converſant with the controverſy, which has been agitated between Chriſtians and Unbelievers, will admit the propriety of this concluding reflection. The enemies of religion ſtrive to divert the attention of mankind from its divine and benevolent tendency. They fix on ſome real or ſeeming difficulties in the Sacred Writings, and having puzzled the underſtandings of their readers, ſeduce them into the belief, that the objections are unanſwerable, and, conſequently, that revelation is unworthy their attention.

But waving the conſideration, that *natural religion*, or *deiſm*, is not without very conſiderable difficulties (which have driven ſome inconſiderate perſons into Atheiſm) how much fairer a part would Unbelievers act, were they to ſtudy *the real deſign* of religion, as it is delineated

* Saurin's Sermons, vol. 2. The *late* Dr. Lardner has two admirable diſcourſes on *Worldly-Mindedneſs*. See Kippis's edition of Lardner's Works, vol. 10th.

and

and exemplified by Jeſus Chriſt and his apoſtles, in the New Teſtament. And what *is* the real deſign of Chriſtianity, freed from every contaminating mixture? Not to perplex and confound the human mind with inexplicable myſteries, nor to puff up its profeſſors with conceit, with pride, and with uncharitableneſs: no; it is, in a word, deſigned and calculated to train up the children of men by the belief of *certain plain truths*, and by the diſcharge of *certain important duties*, for the enjoyment of a BLESSED IMMORTALITY!

To man, both in his individual and ſocial capacity, the religion of Chriſt, juſtly underſtood, and thoroughly felt, is eſſentially ſerviceable. As an *individual*, he is enlightened by its doctrines, regulated by its precepts, ſuſtained by its promiſes, and impelled to action by its moſt awful ſanctions. As a *member of ſociety*, the goſpel teaches man to ſubdue the turbulence of his paſſions, and to ſoften the rudeneſs of his manners. It not only ſtrengthens the ties by which mankind are bound to each other, but generates and promotes the virtues of peace and of integrity, which are at once the glory and bulwark of civilized ſociety *.

" *The*

* Even Mr. Gibbon has borne his teſtimony to the favourable influence of the Chriſtian religion upon ſociety, in

" *The ſubſtance of true religion* (ſays the intelligent author of the *Rational* Catechiſm) *conſiſts neither in ceremonies nor notions, but in ſincerity and practice. It lies not in outward profeſſion* * *and ſhew; not in meats and drinks* †, *and other carnal ordinances; not in ſacrifices* ‡, *tho' even of God's own appointment; not in faith* §, *nay not in gifts* ‖, *how excellent ſoever; nor even in the knowledge of deepeſt myſteries.* Theſe things indeed are means and inſtruments. But *the* ¶ *end of all is righteouſneſs*, and

ſeveral parts of his Hiſtory of *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire.* The following paſſage is too remarkable not to be introduced to the notice and attention of the reader. Mr. Gibbon, ſpeaking of the 5th century, obſerves, that " In the moſt corrupt ſtate of *Chriſtianity*, the Barbarians might learn juſtice from the *law*, and mercy from the *goſpel*: and if the knowledge of their duty was inſufficient to guide their actions, or to regulate their paſſions, they were ſometimes reſtrained by conſcience, and frequently puniſhed by remorſe. But the direct authority of religion was leſs effectual than the *holy communion*, which united them with their Chriſtian brethren in *ſpiritual friendſhip*. The influence of *theſe ſentiments* contributed to ſecure their fidelity in the ſervice, or the alliance of the Romans, to alleviate the horrors of war, to moderate the inſolence of conqueſt, and to preſerve, in the downfal of the empire, a permanent reſpect for the name and inſtitutions of Rome." Octavo edition, vol. 6th, p. 272, 275.

* Rom. xxviii. 29.—Gal. vi. 25. † Heb. ix. 20.
‡ Iſa. i. 11. § Jam. ii. 14. ‖ 1 Cor. xiii. 2.
¶ Rom. xiv. 17.

the

the effect thereof is *peace and joy in the Holy Ghoſt.* What God requires at our hands towards himſelf is, * *that we adore him in ſpirit and in truth.* What he requires of us towards our neighbours is, † *brotherly kindneſs and charity.* St. James explains this laſt branch in telling us, that ‡ *pure religion and undefiled, before God the Father, conſiſts in viſiting the fatherleſs and widows in their affliction, and in keeping ourſelves unſpotted from the world.* And the prophet Micah comprehends both branches, in requiring us § *to do juſtly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God.* Theſe then are the eternal and indiſpenſible laws of God to mankind. *The Goſpel of Jeſus Chriſt* is ſo far from diſpenſing with them, that its *great deſign* is to enforce them more ſtrongly, and to bind us thereunto more firmly than either *the law of nature,* or *the law of Moſes* had done before. It teaches us, that—*to* ‖ *fear God, and to work righteouſneſs, are the means to procure acceptance with him, and to ſecure* ¶ *our happineſs both here and hereafter.*"

Such is the uniform deſign of revelation, and this is that ſpecies of evidence which is emphatically denominated—*the internal evidence* of our religion. When therefore we wiſh to rouſe the

* John iv. 23, 24. † 1 Cor. xiii. 1.—2 Pet. i. 7.
‡ Jam. i. 27. § Micah vi. 8. ‖ Acts x. 35. Rom. xiv. 18.
¶ 1 Pet. iii. 11.—Matt. x. 2.—2 Tim. iv. 7, 8.

attention

attention of men to this intereſting part of the ſubject, we by no means intend to turn away their minds from the *external evidences* with which Chriſtianity is accompanied, and which are deſerving of the utmoſt attention *. The *internal* evidence however, though plain, popular, and ſtriking, is not, in general, ſufficiently regarded, and has been groſsly miſrepreſented. Such is the opinion of many able writers, who are converſant with the deiſtical controverſy, and eſpecially of that judicious defender of Chriſtianity, the late Dr. Alexander Gerard, in his maſterly work, entitled *Diſſertations on the Genius and Evidences of Chriſtianity*. He deems the matter of ſo much conſequence, as to commence his introduction to the ſubject with the following ſpecific ſtatement †.

" The

* In *Paley's View of the Evidences of Chriſtianity*, theſe *external evidences* are ably and fully illuſtrated. This treatiſe ſhould be carefully peruſed by every individual who is inclined to *ſcepticiſm*, than which nothing is more inimical to our preſent and future felicity.

† The author is happy in the opportunity of paying this tribute of reſpect to the memory of his old tutor, who, for a long ſeries of years filled, with no ſmall reputation, the Divinity Chair in the Univerſity of Aberdeen. By the more intelligent part of the Chriſtian world, his lectures and writings were held in great and deſerved eſtimation. In the deceaſe of *Dr. A. Gerard*, and of *Dr. George Campbell*, the Church of Scotland has ſuſtained a loſs that will not be eaſily repaired.

May

" The evidences of the Chriſtian religion may very properly be diſtinguiſhed into two kinds, the *direct* and the *collateral*. It is on the former of theſe, that Chriſtian writers have beſtowed the greateſt part of their attention. They are commonly reduced to two heads, *internal* and *external* evidences. Both have been fully illuſtrated, and frequently urged. The external evidences of Chriſtianity are miracles and prophecies; theſe are the directeſt proofs of its divinity. Its *internal* evidence, however, has likewiſe conſiderable force; much *greater* force it might eaſily be ſhown than ſome Chriſtian writers have allowed it. This evidence ariſes from its excellence. But when its excellence is urged as a *direct* proof of its truth and divinity, it will be proper to conſider that excellence in reference to the *main and principal end* of Chriſtianity. The want of attention to *this*, has often led Chriſtians into groſs perverſions of the doctrines of their religion; and has given occaſion to many of the objections of infidels againſt it, which would be ſhown at once to be frivolous and impertinent, by only aſcertaining the *kind* of excellence which it is reaſonable to demand

May God continue to raiſe a ſucceſſion of miniſters who ſhall employ talents equally ſolid, and an erudition equally profound, for the defence and elucidation of the Chriſtian religion!

in

in Chriſtianity. We talk at random, concerning the excellence or defects of any ſyſtem till we have firſt diſcovered the preciſe end and deſign of that ſyſtem: excellence always conſiſts in the fitneſs of a thing for anſwering ſome determinate end of real importance. It is ſufficient for rendering any inſtitution excellent in its kind, that it be adapted to the end which it in fact propoſes; though there may be many other ends very valuable in themſelves, which it has no tendency to promote."

"The *end* which Chriſtianity *profeſſedly* aims at, is *the ſpiritual improvement of mankind, the preſent virtue and comfort, and the future perfection and happineſs of all who yield themſelves up to its power.* It keeps *this end* continually in view; it repreſents all its doctrines, and all its precepts, as means of promoting *this end*; it is careful to ſet them in that attitude in which they may moſt directly and powerfully contribute to it. Chriſtians have not always conſidered the goſpel in this light; they have not ſearched it with a deſire only to find food, by which their ſouls may be nouriſhed unto eternal life; but they have ſought for what may gratify their curioſity, give an occaſion for diſplaying their ingenuity, or countenance refinements into which they had previouſly run: and while they were intent on drawing from the goſpel imaginary benefits,

which

which it was never deſigned to afford, they have too often loſt ſight of the *real* and *important* advantages of which it is *naturally* productive. A miſapprehenſion of the proper and ultimate end of Chriſtianity, and a deſire conſequent on that miſapprehenſion of applying it to purpoſes remote from its intention, is the ſource to which we may trace up moſt of the ſubtle and intricate diſcuſſions impoſed on the world in all ages, as the doctrines of Chriſt, and moſt of the frivolous and abſtruſe controverſies, which have been agitated as queſtions very eſſential to religion."

"When Chriſtians have thus over-looked *the deſign* of that religion which they profeſs to believe, it is no wonder that infidels have miſtaken it too. *Their miſtake concerning it, is the only foundation of many of their objections.* When they hear it aſſerted, that Chriſtianity is excellent, they ſuppoſe that it ought to contribute ſomething to *every* end that is valuable in *any* ſenſe, however foreign to its profeſſed deſign; and if they can think of any purpoſe which they are pleaſed to reckon deſirable, but to which Chriſtianity contributes not, they take it for granted that this is contrary to excellence, that it is a defect, and an objection againſt a divine original. But as *the profeſſed end* of Chriſtianity is indiſputably moſt important, and what ought to be the ultimate end of all religion, ſo it is ſolely by examining its fitneſs for promoting *this*

end, that we ought to determine whether it is excellent or not. If it contains powerful means of virtue, if it affords ſolid grounds of joy, ſuited to the condition of human creatures, it is excellent; it not only is ſuch a religion as may have been revealed by God, and ought to be received as a poſitive proof that it was revealed by him, but its *very ſtructure* indicates that it actually is *divine*, in a manner ſimilar to that in which the benign and wiſe contrivance of the world proves it to be the work of God. Admit that it throws no new light upon any of the ſciences; that it corrects not the errors of the vulgar, concerning the conſtitution of nature; that it gives no deciſion in many queſtions which ſpeculative men have raiſed concerning religion and morality; that it affords not the means of gratifying idle curioſity, with reſpect to all the circumſtances, and motives, and uſes of the very diſpenſation which itſelf brings to light; that it is in no degree ſubſervient to many purpoſes very deſirable to mankind: a thouſand objections of this ſort are of no weight: they are wholly beſide the purpoſe; they amount only to this, that Chriſtianity promotes not ends which it never had in view; it is *ſufficient* that it is *exactly adapted* to its *own end*. It is from the importance of this, and from its fitneſs for promoting

noting it, that the *proper excellence* of CHRISTIANITY ariſes *."

The excellence of this quotation apologizes for its length, and the reader need not be reminded of the truth and importance of the obſervations it contains. The revival of the deiſtical controverſy, eſpecially by Mr. Gibbon, and Mr. Thomas Paine, muſt ſtrongly impreſs the above ſentiments on our minds. The objections of theſe two gentlemen, for the moſt part, originated in an inattention to the *real* deſign, and *genuine* tendency of the religion of Chriſt.

But it may be aſked by the Unbeliever, whether the *evidences of Chriſtianity* have ever been known to convince a ſingle individual of *the truth* of Chriſtianity, who was previouſly inclined to diſcard it? We anſwer in the affirmative. Many inſtances, might be adduced, and one is ſo remarkable, that it muſt not be here paſſed over in ſilence. It is that of the *Honourable George*

* In Dr. Edward Ryan's *Hiſtory of the Influence of Religion on Mankind*, are ſhewn the decided good effects which religion in general, and Chriſtianity in particular, have produced on mankind. It is to be regretted, that ſo meritorious a publication, ſhould contain illiberal and unjuſt reflections on *the Puritans*. Whatever were their infirmities, they are entitled to our eſteem and thanks for their continued exertions in the cauſe of civil and religious liberty. Even *Hume*, the ingenious apologiſt for the *Stuart* family, could not, in juſtice, withhold from them this tribute of praiſe.

Lord Lyttleton, who died in the year 1773. Upon this inſtance, we ſhall dwell the more particularly, becauſe it forms a ſtriking contraſt with the caſe and conduct of Mr. *Gibbon*. Not that we reſt our religion on human authority, but when its foes boaſt of an *Helvetius*, a *Voltaire*, an *Hume*, or a *Gibbon*, its friends are juſtified in bringing forward the illuſtrious names of a *Newton*, a *Locke*, an *Hartley*, or a *Lyttleton*. We only oppoſe the one to the other, and Unbelievers ſhould not blame a mode of defence which their own manner of treating revelation has rendered neceſſary to be adopted *.

This

* Lord Lyttleton diſtinguiſhed himſelf not only as a ſtateſman, but alſo as a writer. His works are compriſed in nine *Octavo* volumes. His Hiſtory of *Henry the Second* may be denominated his Chef-d'œuvre, "elaborated (ſays Dr. Johnſon) by the ſearches and deliberations of *twenty years*." There is then an additional propriety in contraſting the caſe and conduct of Lord Lyttleton with that of Mr. Gibbon, ſince they were both hiſtorians of very conſiderable merit and reputation, and what is remarkable, employed the ſame number of years in completing their reſpective hiſtorical productions. The elegant Mr. Hayley, in his *Epiſtles on Hiſtory*, addreſſed to Mr. Gibbon, after having ſpoken of Hume, thus characteriſes *Henry the Second*:—

"With purer ſpirit, free from party ſtrife,
To ſoothe his evening hour of honour'd life,
See candid LYTTLETON at length unfold
The deeds of liberty, in days of old!

Fond

This nobleman " had (ſays Dr. Samuel Johnſon, ſpeaking of Lord Lyttleton *) in the pride of juvenile confidence, with the help of corrupt converſation, entertained doubts of the truth of Chriſtianity; but he thought the time now come, when it was no longer fit to doubt, or believe by chance, and applied himſelf ſeriouſly to *the great queſtion*. His ſtudies being *honeſt*, ended in *conviction*. He found that *religion* was *true*, and what he had learned he endeavoured to teach, (1747) by obſervations on the converſion of St. Paul; a treatiſe to which infidelity has never been able to fabricate a ſpecious anſwer. This book his father had the happineſs of ſeeing, and expreſſed his pleaſure, in a letter, which deſerves to be inſerted.

" I have read your religious treatiſe with infinite pleaſure and ſatisfaction. The ſtyle is fine,

> Fond of the theme and narrative, with age
> He winds the lengthen'd tale thro' many a page;
> But there the beams of *patriot virtue* ſhine;
> There *truth* and *freedom* ſanctify the line,
> And laurels due to civil wiſdom ſhield
> This *noble Neſtor* of the hiſtoric field."

In Johnſon's *Lives of the Poets* is to be found, the life of this great man. Dr. Towers, however, ſpeaking of *that life*, remarks, that Dr. Johnſon " has not done juſtice to Lord Lyttleton's merit as a writer, and ſeems to have confeſſed to Mrs. Thrale, that he wrote his life with ſome *perſonal prejudice* againſt him." Towers's Tracts, vol. I. page 399.

* Lives of the Poets, vol. iv.

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the arguments close, cogent, and irresistible. May the King of Kings, whose glorious cause you have so well defended, reward your pious labours, and grant, that I may be found worthy, through the merits of Jesus Christ, to be an eye-witness of that happiness, which I don't doubt he will bountifully bestow upon you. In the meantime, I shall never cease glorifying God, for having endowed you with such useful talents, and giving me so good a son.

" Your affectionate father,

THOMAS LYTTLETON."

Such is the account given us by Dr. Johnson of the scepticism and conversion of Lord Lyttleton. A few pages after, he informs us, that this great and good man, on his death-bed, and only two days previous to his dissolution, addressed his physician in these memorable words: " Doctor, you shall be my confessor. When I first set out in the world, I had friends who endeavoured to shake my belief in the Christian religion. I saw difficulties which staggered me, but *I kept my mind open to conviction.* The evidences and doctrines of Christianity, *studied with attention,* made me a *most firm and persuaded believer* of the Christian religion. I have made it the rule of my life, and—*it is the ground of my future hopes.*"

Striking

Striking and ſublime is this declaration of the expiring nobleman. How much ſuperior to the cloſe of Mr. Gibbon's life, who gave not the remoteſt indication of thoſe hopes and proſpects which it is the excluſive privilege of the Chriſtian religion to furniſh, and which are alone capable of allaying the fears of death, and of aſſuaging the agonies of diſſolution. Mr. Gibbon, eager for the continuation of his preſent exiſtence, declared, about *twenty hours* previous to his departure, that he thought himſelf a good life for *ten, twelve*, or perhaps *twenty* years. So that he entertained little apprehenſion of the awful event which was almoſt immediately awaiting him. Whereas, the phyſician informs us, reſpecting Lord Lyttleton, that "on the evening when the ſymptoms of death came on (he ſaid) *I ſhall die, but it will not be your fault.*" When Lord and Lady Valentia came to ſee his Lordſhip, he gave them his ſolemn benediction, and ſaid, "*be good, be virtuous, my Lord; you muſt come to this.*" Thus he continued giving his dying benediction to all around him. On Monday morning a lucid interval gave ſome ſmall hopes, but theſe vaniſhed in the evening, and he continued dying, but with very little uneaſineſs, till Tueſday morning, when he expired almoſt without a groan."

As there was a wide difference between the conduct

conduct of Lord Lyttleton and of Mr. Gibbon, reſpecting religion, during their life, ſo there is a ſimilar difference between the manner in which each of them quitted this preliminary ſtate of exiſtence. The latter, averſe to the thoughts of diſſolution, dreamt of *future years*, when the lamp of life was on the very point of being extinguiſhed. The former, meeting death full in the face, partook of the ſupports, and diſplayed the triumphs of that religion, of which he had long been the bright ornament, and the able defender. *Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright, for the end of that man is peace!* *

But the reader may be deſirous of knowing the nature of Lord Lyttleton's publication, being the fruits of his having kept *his mind open to conviction*, and which was matter of exultation to him in his laſt moments. He ſhall be gratified. A brief ſketch of its contents may not prove

* Death-bed ſcenes rouſe the moſt dormant, and impreſs the moſt obdurate. "A battle, or a triumph, (ſays Mr. *Addiſon*) are conjunctures in which not one man in a million is likely to be engaged; but when we ſee a perſon at the point of death, we cannot forbear being attentive to every thing he ſays or does, becauſe we are *ſure* that ſome time or other we ſhall ourſelves be in the ſame melancholy circumſtances. The general, the ſtateſman, or the philoſopher, are perhaps characters which we may never act in—but *the dying man* is one, whom *ſooner* or *later*, we ſhall *certainly* reſemble."

unſeaſonable

unſeaſonable in theſe times of infidelity and diſſipation.

Poſſibly the account, which has been already given of it, by Lord Lyttleton's father, may be thought to ſavour of partiality, for he would no doubt view his ſon's production with a paternal eye. Hear then its character from two able and reſpectable divines, Dr. John Leland, and Dr. Philip Doddridge.

Dr. Leland, in his *View of the Deiſtical Writers*, notices the moſt diſtinguiſhed replies which were made to the attacks of infidelity. In the 12th Letter of the firſt volume of that very uſeful work, he obſerves, "I hope you will indulge me in giving ſome account of a ſhort, but juſtly admired treatiſe, which was written by a learned layman, Sir *George Lyttleton*. It is entitled, *Obſervations on the Converſion and Apoſtleſhip of St. Paul*, in a letter to Gilbert Weſt, Eſq. The great advantage of this performance is, that the evidences for Chriſtianity are here drawn to one point of view, for the uſe of thoſe who will not attend to a long ſeries of argument. The deſign is to ſhow that the converſion and apoſtleſhip of St. Paul, alone conſidered, is of itſelf, a demonſtration ſufficient to prove Chriſtianity to be a divine revelation: this deſign is very happily executed. He firſt conſidereth the account St. Paul himſelf hath given of the miraculous manner of his converſion; and thence

argueth, that it muſt of neceſſity be, that the perſon atteſting theſe things of himſelf either was an impoſtor, who ſaid what he knew to be falſe, with an intent to deceive, or he was an enthuſiaſt, who, by the force of an over-heated imagination, impoſed on himſelf, or he was deceived by the fraud of others, or laſtly, what he declared to be the cauſe of his converſion, and to have happened in conſequence of it, did all really happen, and therefore the Chriſtian religion is a divine revelation. That he was not an impoſtor, he proves by ſhewing, with admirable clearneſs and ſtrength, that he could have no rational motive to undertake ſuch an impoſture, nor could poſſibly have carried it on, with any ſucceſs, by the means we know he employed. With equal evidence he ſheweth, that St. Paul was not an enthuſiaſt, that he had not thoſe diſpoſitions which are eſſential ingredients in that character; and that he could not poſſibly have impoſed on himſelf by any power of enthuſiaſm, either with regard to the miracle that cauſed his converſion, or to the conſequential effects of it, or to ſome other circumſtances which he bears teſtimony to, in his epiſtles, eſpecially the miracles wrought by him, and the extraordinary gifts conferred upon him, and upon the Chriſtian converts to whom he wrote. Suppoſe all this to have been only owing to the ſtrength of

his

his own imagination, when there was in reality no ſuch thing at all, is to ſuppoſe him to have been all this time quite out of his ſenſes. And then it is abſolutely impoſſible to account how ſuch a diſtempered enthuſiaſt and madman could make ſuch a progreſs, as we know he did, in converting the Gentile world. He next proceeds to ſhew, that St. Paul was not deceived by the fraud of others; if the diſciples of Chriſt could have conceived ſo ſtrange a thought, as that of turning his perſecutor into his apoſtle, they could not poſſibly have effected it in the manner in which it was effected, with the extraordinary conſequences that followed upon it. It is evident then, that what he ſaid of himſelf, could not be imputed to the deceit of others, no more than to wilful impoſture or enthuſiaſm. And then it followeth, that what he relateth to have been the cauſe of his converſion, and to have happened in conſequence of it, did all really happen, and therefore the Chriſtian religion is a divine revelation *."

Dr.

* How far *pride* and *inattention* operate in certain individuals, to the rejection of Chriſtianity, the Divine Being only *knows*, whoſe excluſive privilege it is *to ſearch the heart*, and before whoſe tribunal they muſt be *finally* adjudged. But the fact is indiſputable. Jeſus Chriſt has finely expreſſed the operation of theſe *two* cauſes in the following paſſages:—John v. 44. Πῶς δυνάσθε ὑμεῖς πιςεῦσαι δόξαν παρα ἀλλήλων λαμβάνονλες, καὶ τὴν δόξαν τὴν παρὰ τȣ μόνȣ θεȣ ȣ̓ ζητεῖτε;

Dr. Doddridge alſo, in the Poſtſcript to the Preface of the third volume of his Family Expoſitor, bears the following teſtimony to the excellence of the ſame performance: "The world has been bleſſed with an admirable production from the pen of one of the politeſt writers and worthieſt of men, who is lately become the public advocate of that religion to which he hath much longer been a diſtinguiſhed ornament. Many of my readers will undoubtedly know that I refer to the *Obſervations on the Converſion and Apoſtleſhip of St. Paul*, by the Honourable George Lyttleton, Eſq. one of the Lords of the Treaſury—a piece, if I may preſume to give my opinion of it, as perfect in its kind, as any our age has produced. I cannot but greatly regret, that I have not the opportunity of enriching my notes on the *Acts*, with ſeveral of this gentleman's judicious and entertaining remarks, which I ſhall not fail to attempt, if a *ſecond edition* ſhould be required. In the meantime I mention it here, that no one who has it in his power may loſe the pleaſure and benefit of peruſing that maſterly treatiſe, in which he will find the moſt compendious, yet unanſwer-

How can ye believe who receive honour one of another, and ſeek not the honour that cometh from God only?—Matt. xxii. 5. Οἱ δὲ ἀμελήσαντες ἀπῆλθον ὁ μὲν εἰς τὸν ἴδιον ἀγρὸν, ὁ δὲ εἰς τὴν ἐμπορίαν αὐτου. *But they making light of it, went their ways—one to his farm—another to his merchandize!*

able

able *demonſtration of Chriſtianity*, propoſed in ſo clear, elegant, and nervous a manner, with ſuch intermingled traces of the author's excellent heart, that he muſt ſurely be amongſt the moſt perfect, or the moſt untractable of mankind, who is not greatly inſtructed and edified by it."

Such are the ſentiments of competent judges concerning the production of Lord Lyttleton. Theſe ſentiments are tranſcribed at length, to ſhew that talents and erudition of a ſuperior kind were employed ſucceſsfully, by a layman, who was once an Unbeliever, for the defence and illuſtration of the Chriſtian religion. How much more honourable would the Roman Hiſtorian's conduct have appeared, had he emulated this illuſtrious example!

Suppoſe that Mr. Gibbon, upon finiſhing his elaborate Hiſtory of *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, had, like Lord Lyttleton, ſat down to the *great queſtion*, reſpecting *the truth* of Chriſtianity—it is more than probable, that his enquiries would have terminated in conviction, becauſe he, of all modern Unbelievers, is allowed to have beſt underſtood that ſtriking branch of the argument for Chriſtianity, which ariſes from its promulgation. In conſequence of this favourable iſſue, he would either have expunged or corrected certain paſſages, in the two obnoxious chapters which have given ſuch juſt

umbrage

umbrage to the friends of revelation. Thus would he have exhibited to the world *a greatneſs of mind*, which could not fail of rendering his character more eſtimable in the eyes of the ſenſible and virtuous part of mankind, and of placing his fame upon a more ſecure and durable baſis. Whereas, *now*, theſe chapters, replete with inſinuations againſt our religion, remain an awful monument of the weakneſs of the human underſtanding, ſince it will appear, that even the talents and erudition of a GIBBON, did not preſerve him from proſtituting his powers in the wretched cauſe of infidelity!†

Chriſtians, however, who profeſs to believe in the *divine origin* of their religion, ſhould not indulge any ſerious apprehenſions on account of the attacks to which it has been ſubjected. Nor need they be greatly alarmed at the unuſual progreſs which infidelity is now making in the earth. The gloom of ſcepticiſm, which is daily gathering and ſettling over the nations of Europe, will be diſſipated by the return of pure and unadulterated Chriſtianity. The Divine arm, which, in the primitive ages, was

* "I will venture to ſay, that, ſo far as I can learn, *few* of the *enemies* of Chriſtianity, various as their forms, and ſpecious as ſome of their pretences may have been, have raiſed the character of their *knowledge* or of their *virtue* among the beſt judges and examples of both, by *any attack* they have made *upon it.*" *Doddridge's Letters* to the author of a deiſtical treatiſe—entitled CHRISTIANITY *not founded in argument.*

ſtretched

ſtretched forth for its promulgation, will, in theſe latter times, enſure it a ſtill more illuſtrious triumph. It muſt nevertheleſs be recollected, that agreeable to the ſuggeſtion of Sir Iſaac Newton, an almoſt univerſal prevalence of infidelity, is in the diſpenſations of Providence, expected to precede the ultimate diffuſion of truth and righteouſneſs. Unbelievers may deem the miracles of Chriſt to be the tricks of a magician, and the prophecies of ſcripture to be the effuſions of a diſtempered imagination. From the intrinſic excellence of our religion, borne down and buried beneath a heap of rubbiſh, the eye of the rational enquirer may be averted. The followers of Chriſt may be loaded with calumny, and ſtigmatized with being the diſciples of fanaticiſm and ſuperſtition. But this *inverted* ſtate of things continues only for a limited period. The ſame infinite wiſdom that predicted this temporary degradation of religion, has alſo aſſured us of its ſubſequent triumph and glory. By its celeſtial radiance, *the truth, as it is in Jeſus*, ſhall break through every cloud by which its ſplendor has been eclipſed, and in which it has been involved, either by the weakneſs of its friends, or by the malignity of its enemies. Like yonder ſun in the firmament, it ſhall burſt upon the aſtoniſhed ſoul, in all that attractive effulgence, with which God hath originally inveſted

veſted it. Its nature, its evidences, its tendency, will be clearly underſtood, and thoroughly felt, ſhooting its beams into the remoteſt regions of the globe! *There ſhall be one Lord over all the earth, and his name one. That name ſhall be great from the riſing to the ſetting ſun. There ſhall be nothing to hurt or deſtroy in all the holy mountain of God; but judgment ſhall dwell in the wilderneſs, and righteouſneſs remain in the fruitful field; the deſert ſhall rejoice and bloſſom as the roſe, and the earth ſhall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the ſea* *.

In the meantime, let us remember, and let it be impreſſed upon the minds of the RISING GENERATION, that the aſſaults which Chriſtianity has ſuſtained from its enemies, have terminated in its favour, and that ſimilar efforts will only accompliſh ends the moſt contrary to their intentions. So that at the conſummation of all things, when the diſpenſations of Providence are completely developed, JESUS CHRIST may addreſs his avowed and even bittereſt enemies with the language in which Joſeph addreſſed his brethren—*As for you—ye thought evil againſt me—but God meant it unto good.*

Should it be enquired, *how* the attacks of Unbelievers, can poſſibly be of advantage to *the*

* Zech. xiv. 9.—Mal. i. 11.—Iſa. xxxii. 16.—xxxv. 1.

religion

religion of Jeſus? It is replied, in the words of an able writer *—" The advantages ariſing to Chriſtianity from thoſe objections by which infidels intended to ſubvert it, are—the force of its evidences has been pointed out and aſcertained; every exception againſt them has been examined, and ſhown to be groundleſs; the proofs of its divinity have been fully illuſtrated, and ſet in a variety of ſtriking lights; trivial or queſtionable arguments have been by degrees abandoned; ſeemingly jarring arguments have been explained with greater preciſion, and by ſuch explication reconciled; the ſtrongeſt objections have only produced a deeper and more ſatisfying inveſtigation of the principles from which the evidences of Chriſtianity derive their force; the defence of this religion has been rendered in a great meaſure pure, conſiſtent, and uniformly ſolid; many collateral proofs of it have been attended to and proſecuted; Chriſtians have been led to the moſt explicit declarations of their belief of it; and they have been excited to avoid or to remove thoſe corruptions which would eclipſe the ſplendor of its evidence. In *all* theſe ways, the trial to which infidels have put the truth of Chriſtianity has been the oc-

* See the late Dr. Alexander Gerard's very ingenious *Diſſertation*, entitled, *Chriſtianity confirmed by the Oppoſition of Infidels.*

occaſion of its receiving new light and confirmation. The obſervations which have been made, are the reſult of *a review of the controverſy* between Chriſtians and infidels; it is only by attention to *the progreſs*, and the *actual ſtate* of this controverſy, that they ought to be examined, and by *ſuch* attention they will be *fully* juſtified."

"There is however an objection, which ſeems to ariſe from matter of fact. The continuance and growth of infidelity proves it may be thought, either that the evidence of Chriſtianity is not brought by the oppoſition of infidels into the ſtate which we have ſuppoſed; or that its being brought into that ſtate, is not an advantage upon the whole. But it really proves neither. It is not my deſign to examine all the cauſes of the riſe, or of the growth of infidelity; but it will not be pretended, that *all infidels become ſuch on a deliberate enquiry into all the reaſonings for and againſt Chriſtianity*. Infidels themſelves diſclaim this as a drudgery to mean for their great abilities; they boaſt of having diſcovered a ſhorter way to truth, and the writings of moſt of them demonſtrate, that they have ſpared themſelves the pains of beſtowing any attention on the defences of Chriſtianity. From *their* opinion then, no concluſion can be drawn, concerning the ſtate in which the controverſy really ſtands. What that ſtate is,

they

they cannot poſſibly know, who have never enquired into it. Though every argument for Chriſtianity were rendered irreſiſtible, and every objection againſt it fully confuted, *theſe* can thence derive no advantage. The cleareſt illuſtration of the evidences of this religion, cannot prevent infidelity from ſpreading among thoſe who are not determined by evidence, but led by faſhion, or an affected ſuperiority to vulgar belief, or who take up with any ſpecious argument upon one ſide. That the infidelity of ſome ſhould lead others into infidelity, is by no means ſurpriſing: that it ſhould, and yet the efforts of infidelity have as great a tendency as we have aſcribed to them, to add ſtrength to the evidences of the goſpel, is far from being marvellous. Almoſt every thing produces mixed effects. That will ſeduce the thoughtleſs, the prejudiced, and the vicious, which contributes powerfully to the confirmation of the honeſt and conſiderate. The firſt and moſt obvious effects may often be of the pernicious kind, and yet if time be allowed, the conſequences may be, on the whole, highly beneficial. An age or two appears very conſiderable to us, but it is not conſiderable in the eye of God: for many ages he permitted rudeneſs and idolatry to prevail amongſt all the nations, and in many nations it ſtill continues to prevail. Need we wonder then, that he has

permitted

permitted infidelity to grow ſo long, as it has yet grown, or that he ſhould even ſuffer it to ſubſiſt *much longer*, and to ſpread *much wider?* Or can we thence conclude, that it will be in the end triumphant? All the diſpenſations of Providence are progreſſive; they are often unfolded by very ſlow degrees; from their appearance, for an age or two, we cannot determine what will be the final iſſue. All the oppoſition of infidels to Chriſtianity has been unſucceſsful; their objections have been anſwered; every new attempt has only afforded a new proof of their weakneſs: they are obſtinate enough to repeat their attempts, with hopes of better ſucceſs; and they who take not the pains to learn how often, and how ſhamefully they have been baffled, reckon their obſtinacy the effect of victory, and are ſeduced to their party: but the *natural conſequence* is, that INFIDELITY *ſhould ceaſe at laſt*, and the TRUTH *of* CHRISTIANITY *be acknowledged* by ALL."

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FINIS.